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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 3918th meeting of the Security Council, held on 24 August 1998 in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "Letter dated 11 March 1998 from the Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1998/223) and letter dated 27 March 1998 from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1998/272)", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council has considered the report of the Secretary-General of 5 August 1998 (S/1998/712) submitted pursuant to its resolution 1160 (1998) of 31 March 1998.

"The Security Council remains gravely concerned about the recent intense fighting in Kosovo which has had a devastating impact on the civilian population and has greatly increased the numbers of refugees and displaced persons.

"The Security Council shares the concern of the Secretary-General that the continuation or further escalation of the conflict in Kosovo has dangerous implications for the stability of the region. In particular, the Council is gravely concerned that given the increasing numbers of displaced persons, coupled with the approaching winter, the situation in Kosovo has the potential to become an even greater humanitarian disaster. The Council affirms the right of all refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes. In particular, the Council emphasizes the importance of unhindered and continuous access of humanitarian organizations to the affected population. The Council is concerned over reports of increasing violations of international humanitarian law.

"The Security Council calls for an immediate ceasefire. The Council emphasizes that the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanians must achieve a political solution to the issue of Kosovo and that all violence and acts of terrorism from whatever quarter are unacceptable, and reiterates the importance of the implementation of its resolution 1160 (1998). The Council reaffirms the commitment of all

Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and urges the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership to enter immediately into a meaningful dialogue leading to an end to the violence and a negotiated political solution to the issue of Kosovo. It supports in this context the efforts of the Contact Group, including its initiatives to engage the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanian leadership in discussions on the future status of Kosovo.

"In this regard, the Security Council welcomes the announcement by Dr. Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of the Kosovo Albanian community, of the formation of a negotiating team to represent the interests of the Kosovo Albanian community. The formation of the Kosovo Albanian negotiating team should lead to the early commencement of a substantial dialogue with the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with the aim of ending the violence and achieving a peaceful settlement, including the safe and permanent return of all internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes.

"It remains essential that the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Albanians accept responsibility for ending the violence in Kosovo, for allowing the people of Kosovo to resume their normal lives and for moving the political process forward.

"The Security Council will continue to follow the situation in Kosovo closely and will remain seized of the matter."